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**RELIGIOUS ATTRIBUTION OF EARLY FRANCHE-COMTÉ FIREPLACE
PLAQUES OF THE 16th – THE BEGINNING OF THE 17th CENTURIES**

Abstract. *The purpose of the research is to conduct a comprehensive study and systematise the cast-iron fireplace plaques from the Franche-Comté region of the 16th – the beginning of the 17th centuries, to analyse their symbolism, identify links with the specific religious orders and communities, and demonstrate the role of these artefacts as a source for understanding religious beliefs and the influence of monasteries on the metallurgy. The methodology of the research is based on the systematisation of all known dated plaques from the region, the iconographic, heraldic and stylistic analysis of the reliefs, and the comparison with monastic charters, known armorials and archival materials. In the study there has been used iconographic and historical contextual analysis of the fireplace plaques production in the blast furnaces of Upper Saône in the study. The scientific novelty consists in the first specialised attribution of the plaques from the Franche-Comté region. There was debunked a myth regarding the automatic attribution of the plaques featuring the globus cruciger motif to the Carthusian Order (Ordo Cartusiensis) in the 16th century – by demonstrating that the key element of the Great Chartreuse Coat of Arms – the seven stars – only appeared only from the end of the 17th century onwards. For the first time it has been determined that: the moline (or 'anchor') cross on the 1558 plaque indicates the Cistercian abbeys; the oval Coat of Arms on the 1616 plaque from Avanne belongs to the parish priest Jean Brury of the Order of Malta; the image of a young man in a felt hat on the 1558 plaque is likely St Vernier, the local patron saint of the winemaking. There have been introduced new dates (1501, 1507, 1522, 1555, 1595) and interpretations into the scientific discourse, enabling the reconstruction of iron casting production dynamics and religious practices in the region.*

Conclusions: *the fireplace plaques of Franche-Comté are a unique source that combines religious (apotropaic), political, and domestic symbolism. The Cross of St. Andrew served a protective function and, at the same time, emphasised the national identity of the Comtois; the globus cruciger was interpreted primarily as a symbol of Christ's dominion over the world, rather than exclusively as a Carthusian symbol. The monasteries (the Cistercians and, to some extent, the Carthusians) were considered to be the pioneers of the plaque production, but direct attribution of the tiles is possible only where a complete heraldic ensemble is present. The plaque production is primarily interpreted as a symbol of Christ's dominion over the world, and it clearly correlates with periods of peace and economic prosperity, and ceases entirely during wars (for example, 1595, 1636 – 1650). The elite*

nature of the early plaque (commissioned by the nobility, abbeys, and parish priests) was demonstrated, highlighting their value for the preservation of the cultural heritage of Franche-Comté and for the broader study of European material culture of the 16th – 17th centuries.

Key words: cast-iron fireplace plaques, Franche-Comté, County of Burgundy, heraldry, apotropaic symbolism.

РЕЛІГІЙНА АТРИБУЦІЯ РАНИХ КАМІННИХ ПЛИТ ФРАНШ-КОНТЕ. XVI – початок XVII ст.

Анотація. Мета – здійснити комплексне дослідження та систематизацію камінних чавунних плит регіону Франш-Конте XVI – початку XVII ст. Проаналізувати їхню символіку, визначити зв'язок з конкретними релігійними орденами та спільнотами, показати роль цих артефактів як джерела для розуміння релігійних вірувань і впливу монастирів на металургію. **Методологія дослідження** базується на систематизації всіх відомих датованих плит регіону, іконографічному, геральдичному та стилістичному аналізі рельєфів, порівнянні з монастирськими хартиями, відомими гербовниками й архівними матеріалами. У ході роботи використовувався іконографічний та історико-контекстуальний аналіз виробництва камінних плит у доменних печах Верхньої Сони. **Наукова новизна** полягає у першій спеціалізованій атрибуції плит регіону Франш-Конте. У процесі дослідження полягає у першій спеціалізованій помилку – автоматичне віднесення плит з мотивом *globus cruciger* до Ордену картузіанців (*Ordo Cartusianensis*) у XVI ст., доводячи, що ключовий елемент герба Великої Шартрези – сім зірок – з'являється лише з кінця XVII ст. Вперше встановлено: молінський (“якірний”) хрест на плиті 1558 р. вказує на цистеріанські абатства; овальний герб на плиті 1616 р. з Аванна належить парафіяльному священнику Жану Брюрі з Мальтійського ордену; зображення юнака у фетровому капелюсі на плиті 1558 р. – це, ймовірно, локальний покровитель виноробства св. Верньє. До наукового обігу введено нові датування (1501, 1507, 1522, 1555, 1595 pp.) та інтерпретації, що дають можливість реконструювати динаміку чавуноливарного виробництва та релігійні практики регіону.

Висновки: камінні плити Франш-Конте є унікальним джерелом, що поєднує релігійну (апотропейну), політичну та побутову символіку. Хрест св. Андрія виконував захисну функцію та водночас підкреслював національну ідентичність комтуазців (*Comtois*); *globus cruciger* трактувався переважно як символ панування Христа над світом, а не єдино картезіанський. Монастирі (цистеріанці й частково картузіанці) були піонерами доменного виробництва, але пряма атрибуція плит можлива лише за наявності повного геральдичного комплексу. Виробництво плит чітко корелює з періодами миру й економічного пінесення та повністю припинялося під час воєн (наприклад: 1595, 1636 – 1650 pp.). Дослідження доводить елітарний характер раних плит (замовники – дворянство, абатства, парафіяльні священники), підкреслює їхню цінність для збереження культурної спадщини Франш-Конте та ширшого вивчення європейської матеріальної культури XVI – XVII ст.

Ключові слова: камінні чавунні плити, Франш-Конте, графство Бургундія, геральдика, апотропейна символіка.

Introduction. The County of Burgundy (Franche-Comté) was an important part of the Burgundian state until 1477, centred around the Dukes of Burgundy, with its developed cult of chivalry, solemn ceremonies for the conferral of the Order of the Golden Fleece, active support for the Crusades, as well as exceptional mastery of diplomacy and dynastic alliances. It was the culture of elegant tournaments, exquisite court attire, and the work of artists, sculptors, musicians and poets – an environment that effectively shaped a distinct European civilisational tradition (Davies, 2008, p. 442).

In fact, the Duchy of Burgundy ceased to exist as a dynastic state after the death of Charles the Bold in 1477. The French King, Louis XI, immediately incorporated the Duchy of Burgundy proper (the territories around Dijon) into the royal domain, as well as other

parts of the Burgundian inheritance that were considered fiefs of the French crown. At the same time, Charles the Bold's other lands – primarily Flanders, Brabant, the Netherlands and the County of Burgundy (Franche-Comté) – passed under Habsburg control due to the marriage of his daughter, Mary of Burgundy, to Maximilian I of Habsburg. The Treaty of Senlis of 1493 enshrined this territorial division legally: France officially recognised the Habsburgs' possession of the lands that later became part of the Holy Roman Empire. Hence, the Burgundian inheritance was finally divided between the French crown and the House of Habsburg, bringing an end to the existence of a unified Burgundian political entity.

According to Norman Davies: “there remained nothing of the Burgundian state” (Davies, 2008, p. 443). However, from a cultural perspective, it was not so, as the cast-iron plaques from Franche-Comté reflect, to some extent, the local community's nostalgia for the lost duchy and its legacy. After 1477, the County of Burgundy continued to retain features of the Burgundian national identity. The province acted proudly as the guardian of this heritage, preserving the Burgundian identity in its heraldry and symbols alongside loyalty to the House of Austria (Vernot, 2009, pp. 112–113). According to Aristide Guilbert: “it is in this province, greater in reputation than in size, that one may find the last expression of the old Burgundian nationality” (Guilbert, 1848, vol. 5, p. 21). Meanwhile, the rest of former Burgundy, with its capital at Dijon, was incorporated into the royal domain of France as a privileged province.

Privileges were granted to the historic province of Franche-Comté by the German kings and Burgundian dukes from the 14th century, and it was not for nothing that it was called a “free county”. In the 16th century, Franche-Comté – this unique republic, an autonomous “free county” – managed, due to its declared neutrality, to avoid the protracted wars waged by France against the Holy Roman Empire and Spain. However, the military events of the 17th century devastated its economy and social structure: this refers to the Ten Years' War (1634/1636 – 1644) as the Comtois 'episode' of the Thirty Years' War, and subsequently to the final conquest of Franche-Comté by France in 1678.

In the 16th century, Franche-Comté was under the control of the Spanish branch of the Habsburg dynasty, forming part of the imperial domains of Charles V, and following his abdication, of the inheritance of his son Philip II of Spain. Its main administrative and military headquarters were located in the town of Dole, the county's capital. At the same time, the city of Besançon, although strategically situated at the crossroads between France, Switzerland and the lands of the Empire, was not part of the County of Franche-Comté, but held the status of a free imperial city (French: *ville libre d'Empire*), directly subordinate to the Emperor. One of the branches of the 'Spanish Road' (Spanish: *Camino Español*) – a land route connecting Milan (a Spanish possession) with the Spanish Netherlands (Flanders) – passed through the territory of Franche-Comté, particularly near Besançon. The above-mentioned route served as a vital transport artery for the Spanish troops, diplomacy, postal services and logistics, particularly during the Eighty Years' War (1568 – 1648).

Problem Statement. Taking into consideration the relief images on cast-iron fireplace plaques from the territory of the former County of Burgundy, produced in local foundries during the 16th – 18th centuries, there could be traced the political dimension: the military and political upheavals of the border region, attitudes towards the Habsburg Empire, the annexation by France, the ideological transformations of the French Revolution of 1789, as well as the evolution of heraldic tastes, religious beliefs and aesthetic preferences of the local population – the Comtois (i.e. the indigenous inhabitants of Franche-Comté). The metallurgical factories of Franche-Comté exported a significant portion of their output,

particularly cast-iron plaques, to neighbouring states and provinces of the Kingdom of France (Vernot, 2013, p. 29). The issue on the cast-iron fireplace plaques of Franche-Comté aren't studied enough in the local and Central Western European history, especially the climate, the cast-iron foundry industry, and the military, political and economic history of the province. Hence, this research is relevant.

The purpose of the research is to conduct a comprehensive analysis and systematise the cast-iron fireplace plaques of the Franche-Comté region from the 16th–the beginning of the 17th centuries; to analyse their symbolism, identify links with the specific religious orders and communities, and demonstrate the role of these artefacts as a source for understanding religious beliefs and the influence of monasteries on the metallurgy.

Review of Recent Research and Publications. Numerous research studies were carried out on the cast-iron fireplace plaques (French: plaques de cheminée) from Franche-Comté in the 16th and at the beginning of the 17th centuries, primarily by the French historians, archaeologists and art historians. The main focus was on the heraldic, emblematic, and socio-political aspects of these artefacts, whilst specialised religious attributions (particularly regarding the Carthusians, the Cistercians, and the Order of Malta) were studied insufficiently.

The research done by Nicolas Vernot is considered to be a key contribution to the study of Comtois plaques. Thus, the author analysed the evolution of the symbolism of the plaques in the context of the transition from the Spanish to French rule, emphasising the role of the Cross of St. Andrew as a marker of Burgundian-Habsburg identity and loyalty in the article “Sentiment d'appartenance et loyautés dynastiques dans la Franche-Comté de Louis XIV: le témoignage emblématique des plaques de cheminée et de l'Armorial général” (Vernot, 2002). In his later works, Vernot studied in detail the technological and economic aspects of production in the Haute-Saône, as well as the apotropaic function of column and cross motifs (Vernot, 2009, pp. 100–101; Vernot, 2013, p. 29). He noted the preservation of the St. Andrew's Cross until the mid-18th century, but did not delve into the religious attribution of early plaques (the 16th century), where the globus cruciger motif was often mistakenly associated with the Carthusians.

The collective study conducted by Belhoste, Claerr-Roussel et al. (1994), “La métallurgie du fer en Franche-Comté” is of utmost importance, as there is a detailed map of 16th-century blast furnaces and an analysis of cast iron production in the Upper Saône region (Belhoste, & Claerr-Roussel et al., 1994, pp. 52–405). The authors dated the start of the mass plaque casting to around 1500 (Vy-le-Ferroux, Vellexon), but did not focus on the religious symbolism.

The oldest plaques were dated to the mid-1550s in earlier works, such as Millot (1978), a view refuted by new finds (1501, 1507, 1522). The issue on the monastic metallurgy was covered in diverse studies (Bouchayer, 1956; Belhoste, 1992; Mordefroid, 1991), which highlighted the role of the Carthusians and the Cistercians in blast furnace production (Allévar, Bonlier), but there was no direct link to 16th-century plaques.

Taras Batenko conducted the study on hearth slabs in both France and Europe as a whole during the Late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period in Ukrainian historiography (Batenko, 2024; 2025; 2026).

Hence, the heraldic, political and technological dimensions of the slabs were covered in the previous studies, but the religious attribution of the early period (the 16th – the beginning of the 17th centuries) remains fragmentary and studied insufficiently.

Dated fireplace plaques from Franche-Comté as an indicator of the dynamics of metallurgical production (1501 – 1651). Military upheavals destroyed the forges and

blast furnaces of Franche-Comté repeatedly, particularly in Haute-Saône, where the largest network of such facilities was located (Fig. 1). These waves of destruction occurred at the end of the 15th century, the end of the 16th century (1595 – 1601) and during the Ten Years' War in Franche-Comté (1634/1636 – 1644), a significant episode of the Thirty Years' War. The cast-iron fireplace plaques began to be used there after the first wave of destruction marked by the collapse of the Burgundian state at the beginning of the 16th century.

It is generally accepted that the establishment of blast furnaces in Vy-le-Ferroux (French: Vy-le-Ferroux) and Vellexon (French: Vellexon) in the Upper Saône around 1500 marked the beginning of a new era of blast furnaces for cast iron production in Franche-Comté (Belhoste, & Claerr-Roussel et al., 1994, p. 52). By the mid-16th century, there were around 15 blast furnaces (ironworks) operating in Franche-Comté. Almost all of them were concentrated in the present-day department of Haute-Saône, making this area one of the most important centres for cast iron production in the imperial territories under the rule of the Spanish branch of the House of Habsburg (Belhoste, Claerr-Roussel et al. 1994, pp. 52–53, 377–405). In contrast, there were several recorded blast furnaces in the mountainous part of the Jura massif, near the Swiss border (in the territory of the modern departments of Doubs and, in part, Jura), which were only modernised during the 16th century, following the Upper Saône model, i.e. using the so-called Walloon method (Belhoste, Claerr-Roussel et al., 1994, pp. 54–55). In order to compare, there were 25 iron foundries in operation as of 1567 in Siegerland, one of the largest centres of cast iron foundry production in the German lands of the time (Schubert, 1937, p. 20).

In the late 1970s it was believed in Franche-Comté that the oldest plaques from the region dated from the mid-1550s (Millot, 1978, pp. 26–27). However, the research conducted in recent decades revealed that the fireplace plaques dated inscriptions on their reliefs were already in use there from the early 1500s. The oldest cast-iron plaques from Franche-Comté dated from 1501 and 1507, bearing the coat of arms of Lord Guillaume II d'Auzelle (the Lords d'Auzelle owned the forges at Fretigney and Greucourt in Fresne-Saint-Mamès, Haute-Saône). Moreover, the 1507 plaque is also the oldest known plaque from the county of Burgundy, shaped like a 'furnace door'. Numerous plaques bearing dates were lost over the centuries – broken, melted down, or sold for scrap; those that were turned over and discarded in various rooms during and after the French Revolution of 1789 fared better. They are still being found today during the demolition work in the old buildings.

For example, there is a fireplace plaque from 1522 featuring a large St. Andrew's Cross in the form of two long stripes. The plaque was found during the demolition work in the 'town hall' building of the village of Bougnon (in the Haute-Saône department, near Vesoul), where it had been buried in the ground, turned upside down, probably during the Reign of Terror. It is evident that it was intended for heating one of the rooms in Bougnon, and the date on the plaque – 1522 – may correspond to the start or the early years of the blast furnace's operation in Bougnon (Fig. 1) (Belhoste, & Claerr-Roussel et al., 1994, p. 382). Hence, this fireplace plaque is in fact a pre-written source, providing grounds to assert the existence of a blast furnace or foundry furnace here as early as 1522, rather than from 1539, as is commonly believed among the scholars. The oolitic phosphatic ore used in the Bunyon forge was deemed unsuitable, as it produced iron that was too brittle, as noted in the research into the quality of iron conducted by the Parliament of Dol in 1562: "as for the iron from Bunyon, it is so unsuitable and of such poor quality that it does not deserve to be accepted and used..." (Belhoste, & Claerr-Roussel et al., 1994, pp. 53, 79). Moreover, the blast furnace enterprise

appears to have declined very rapidly, as no traces of it are found in the archives after the 1560s (Belhoste, & Claerr-Roussel et al., 1994, pp. 58, 63, 382).

The plaques found to date demonstrate that any modern inventory of surviving original plaques is no longer capable of fully reconstructing their distribution. However, such studies enable us to come closer to resolving some of the questions raised in this study: when exactly the use of fireplace plaque began and to what extent this was influenced by climatic changes in the region; during which periods their use was most widespread, corresponding to peaks in blast furnace iron production, and how this correlates with climate change; during which periods the production of fireplace plaques ceased completely or almost completely, which may indicate a partial or total halt in blast furnace production for military and political reasons.



Fig. 1. Map of blast furnaces and refining works in Franche-Comté in the 16th century
(Source: Belhoste, & Claerr-Roussel et al., 1994, p. 52).

The systematised results of the author’s research into the discovery and identification of dated cast iron plaques manufactured in Franche-Comté are presented in the table below. There is a summary of the currently known corpus of plaques bearing cast dates, recorded from 1501 until the end of the Thirty Years’ War in the table, and it serves as a basis for further analysis of the dynamics of the cast iron production in the region in relation to the military events and climatic phases.

Table 1

Dated cast-iron fireplace plaques from Franche-Comté, 1501 – 1651

DATED CAST-IRON FIREBACKS FROM
FRANCHE-COMTÉ (1501-1651)

Group	Dates
I	1501, 1507, 1522
II	1551, 1555-1558, 1560-1562, 1575, 1577, 1582-1583, 1585, 1590-1593, 1595
III	1602-1603, 1613-1614, 1616-1628, 1630-1631, 1633-1636, 1651?

Source: author's dataset.

Group I – dated fireplace plaques from the first half of the 16th century, reflecting a period when there were few blast furnaces in Franche-Comté.

Group II – dated fireplace plaques from 1551 to the start of Henry IV's military invasion of Franche-Comté (1595). This phase is characterised by an increase in the number of blast furnaces, a gradual deterioration in climatic conditions, and growing demand among the elite. The small number of dated plaques from the 1560s – 1570s and, to some extent, the 1580s is linked to the economic crisis that befell the County of Burgundy. The shortage of grain and tensions in the agricultural market affected not only food supplies but also the cost of iron (Belhoste, & Claerr-Roussel et al., 1994, p. 56). It should be noted that the plaques from 1560, 1561 and 1562 bear the same personal coat of arms, indicating that they were commissioned by the same patron. Two of these plaques are currently housed in the Citadel of Besançon.

Group III – dated plaques covering the period of the blast furnaces' resumption of operation following the invasion of Henry IV's troops. At the same time, questions remain regarding the absence of dated plaques during the period of 1604 – 1612. According to Nicolas Vernot, it happened due to the slow recovery of the Franche-Comté economy following the military campaign of 1595 and the high price of cast iron. Thus, a genuine recovery in production becomes evident from the 1610s onwards (letter from Nicolas Vernot to the author dated 24 March 2026, CY Cergy Paris Université). There is also no doubt that there was a complete absence of casting of such items during the Thirty Years' War, particularly during the active phase of the Ten Years' War in Franche-Comté – from 1637 to 1650 – when blast furnace production was only partially restored following the end of hostilities. However, as François Lassus noted, blast furnaces destroyed and abandoned by their owners after the Ten Years' War may not have been rebuilt for several decades, and their revival often took place only after a change of ownership. The true revival of blast furnace production in Franche-Comté, which was destroyed during this war, did not occur until 1680 – 1685 (Lassus, 1987, p. 466).

Review of changes in the main hallmarks of Franche-Comté fireplace plaques: technical innovations and policy. There appeared two thin vertical bars, which initially probably served a purely structural function – they were used to reinforce the surface of the cast-iron slab on the 'first-generation' fireplace plaques (from the first two decades of the 16th century) (Fig. 2). However, by the late 1510s – early 1520s, these bars had become thick and carved, taking on a distinctly decorative character and beginning to be interpreted as columns or pillars (Fig. 3).

It should be noted that it was precisely in the 1516s – 1520s that Charles V, after receiving the Spanish crown and subsequently whilst developing his imperial coats of arms for the Holy Roman Empire, introduced the motif of the Pillars of Hercules (colonnes d’Hercule) into his own heraldic system. The above-mentioned created a quite plausible cultural parallel between the development of Charles V’s imperial symbolism and the appearance of column-like elements on the Franche-Comté slabs.

The columns in the form of balusters became the most common element on the Comtois plaques. It is possible that these columns are linked to Charles V, who was the ruler of this region and was considered the greatest military and political figure of the 16th century. In that case, they would symbolise control over the Strait of Gibraltar through the two columns known as the Pillars of Hercules, a famous symbol in Greek and Roman mythology that marked the boundaries of the known world. These columns can also be interpreted: 1) as a religious symbol – perhaps, in the religious imagination of the time, signifying the entrance to Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem; 2) as symbolising the strength of the structure and, in particular, the strength of the cast-iron plaque; 3) to reinforce the plaque or act as a barrier designed to prevent direct contact with the logs, ensuring better air circulation and, consequently, better combustion (Vernot, 2002, p. 18); 4) the two columns form the basis of the coat of arms of the city of Besançon and are reminiscent of the ancient Roman columns that still stood at the end of the 15th century at the top of the present-day citadel of Besançon, that is, near the Roman road leading from Geneva; 5) simply a decorative element of the cast iron casting. In any case, the columns on the mantelpieces have multiple meanings. There is no single explanation for their appearance. Looking at the fireplace plques from Franche-Comté dating from 1522, one cannot help but admire that, even three centuries later, the tradition of casting plaques in a classic rectangular shape with columns, intended to provide additional heating for rooms, remained intact.



Fig. 2. A plaque from Franche-Comté.
Dimensions: height 90 cm, width 92 cm, depth 3 cm. Its stylistic features allow it to be dated to the first decade of the 16th century. The plaque depicts Jerusalem Cross and two St Andrew’s Crosses, between which two columns are situated

Source: Coll. Musée Comtois.



**Fig. 3. Plaques of 1522 with a large St Andrew's Cross.
Found during demolition work at the town hall of the municipality
of Bougnon (Fr. Bougnon, Haute-Saône Department).
Dimensions: 77x77 cm, depth 2.5–4 cm. In this case, the X-shaped symbol serves
not only an apotropaic function but is also used to reinforce the surface
of the cast-iron fireplace plaque (Kremer. Kaminpkatten)**

Source: Leboncoin.fr

It was possible for us to identify three successive types due to observing changes in the depiction of St. Andrew's Cross on the fireplace plaques from the 16th to the first half of the 18th century.

The form of the St Andrew's Cross evolved over two and a half centuries, from a cross consisting of two long bands/bars in the 16th century (Fig. 4), a knotty version (a militarised variant during the period of military and political rivalry with France in the 1660s – 1680s), to the so-called skittle cross, stylised in the form of crossed skittles from the end of the 17th century (Fig. 5). This latter skittle-type St. Andrew's Cross remained in use effectively until the end of the Ancien Régime, demonstrating the dominance of the aesthetic and religious dimensions over the political.

N. Vernot believed that the St. Andrew's Cross remained on the plaques until the late 1740s, when it was completely supplanted by Louis XIV's 'Sun' and the fleur-de-lis (Vernot, 2002, pp. 39, 56). It was not entirely accurate. The Cross of St. Andrew did not disappear entirely from the late 1740s, though it is extremely rare on the plaques from Franche-Comté. There are known plaques featuring the Cross of St. Andrew, dated 1750, 1754 and even 1775. In foundries, the very mould for the beehive-shaped Cross of St Andrew, used after France's final conquest of Franche-Comté, was often converted to produce a standard cross. For example, there are two fireplace plaques (Fig. 6): 1) 1760, dimensions – 90×90; 2) 1765, with fleur-de-lis petals sawn off during the French Revolution, private collection in the Netherlands, dimensions: width 99 cm, height 81 cm, depth 4 cm, weight 135 kg).



A) B)
Fig. 4. St. Andrew's Cross on plaques: a) 1522 and b) 1555

Source: private collection, Claude Augustin.



A) B)
Fig. 5. Fragments of plaques a) 1709 and b) 1746

Source: private collection, Claude Augustin.



A) B)
Fig. 6. Plaques: a) 1760. Source: Pamfilou/Leboncoin.fr, private collection; b) 1765

Source: Charles Nijman Fireplace Antiques, private collection in the Netherlands.

There may have been around 40 blast furnaces and various types of refining works operating in Franche-Comté during the 16th century.

The production and use of fireplace plaques in Franche-Comté were particularly active in the mid-16th century, when the province's blast-furnace network expanded significantly. It can be traced to the plaques, where the dates are written. Due to the author, who carried out a partial inventory of Franche-Comté plaques, whilst working on this issue, it was possible to identify recorded examples cast in 1551, 1555 – 1558 and 1560 – 1562. Taking into consideration the above-mentioned, the significant number of 'silent' – nameless (without dates, names, letters or coats of arms) – plaques with simple, unpretentious decoration – the columns, an apotropaic triangle in the shape of a temple, a 'globus cruciger' (often combined with the sign of the cross or St. Andrew's Cross) – there was active iron casting activity in the mid-16th century, in the County of Burgundy, particularly in the Upper Saône. The decoration on these fireplace plaques often – crosses or a globe – was cast using a "cord" – a mould created by using carved wooden rods with a spiral profile – the so-called "carved rope".



Fig. 7. Fireplace plaques from 1501 bearing the coat of arms of Guillaume II d'Auzelles. It originates from the family castle of Ray-sur-Saône (French: Château de Ray-sur-Saône) in the Upper Saône, Franche-Comté. Dimensions: height 133 cm, width 141 cm, depth (including the projecting frame) 5.8 cm. According to the formula for calculating the original weight of a cast-iron plaque, its initial weight in the foundry would have been approx. 780 kg (margin of error 4–7%). Registration number: 2014.104.6

Source: property of Château de Ray-sur-Saône (Palasi, 2014, p. 64).

The monasteries of the Duchy of Burgundy were the pioneers of iron casting. The Carthusians. At the end of the Middle Ages, Christian monasteries became the leading centres for the revival of the Roman watermill technology in Western Europe, which began to be used in the iron production (Lucas, 2005). Taking into consideration the iron-ore-rich lands of the Duchy and County of Burgundy, as well as the province of Champagne, the monastic ingenuity of the Cistercian Order, and to a lesser extent that of the Benedictines and the Carthusians, provided the impetus for the revolutionary use of water power in iron production, and later in cast iron production, which eventually culminated in the blast furnace revolution. From the mid-11th to the 14th century, the Cistercians were the leading founders

of the iron ore enterprises and played a dominant role in early metallurgy, outpacing other religious institutions (in particular, the Benedictines) whilst competing with the secular lords (Horikoshi, 2007, pp. 66–68; Verna, 1983, pp. 207–212).



Fig. 8. Fireplace plaque, 1507. It was located on the estate of the Detestay family in the village of Rougemont (Doubs department) (AMC (Besançon). Rougemont (Doubs). 2003). In 2012, it was sold at the La Maison Aguttes auction. Dimensions: width – 1.10 m, height – 1.12 m.

Source: La Maison Aguttes auction.

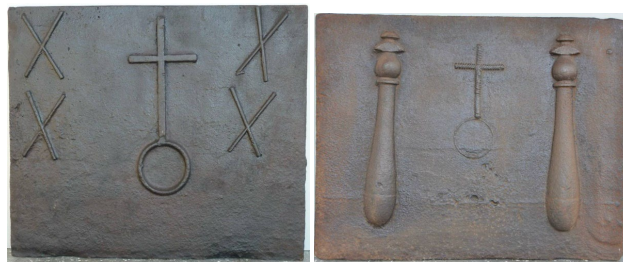
The Cistercians' activities in metallurgy declined gradually from the mid-14th century. According to Benoit Chauvin, a leading researcher on the Cistercian abbeys, there were several reasons, among them was “the economic context of the 14th-century decline: the general weakening of religious orders, a reduction in the recruitment of new members, increasing tax burdens, etc.” (letter from Benoit Chauvin to the author dated 20 October 2025). In addition, the devastation caused by the plague epidemics led many hammer mills to cease operations. This particularly affected the Carthusian forges operating on ore from Allevard in the province of Dauphiné, which fell into decline around 1435 (Belhoste, 1992, p. 5). There were other factors that contributed to the decline of the metallurgical activity, for example, labour shortage, timber and coal shortage, water management issues, the depletion of near-surface ore deposits, and technological stagnation (Bröhl, 2024, p. 150).

The metallurgical activity of the Carthusian monasteries was also significant in scale, alongside that of the Cistercian Order. According to Bouchayer, one of the main reasons that prompted the Carthusian fathers to revive the Gallic iron industry was the Second Crusade (Bouchayer, 1956, p. 144). As it was noted by Belost, iron from Allévar, was controlled by the Carthusians by large, travelled considerable distances: it was transported by mules to barges, and then along the Isère and Rhône rivers to market centres during its medieval heyday, between the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th centuries. This iron was sold in the south of France – in Forez, Avignon and Auvergne, as well as in large quantities

in Lyon, at the fairs of Chalon, and even reached as far as Dijon (Belhoste, 1992, p. 5; Bouchayer, 1956, pp. 149–150).



A)



B)

C)

Fig. 9. a) a fireplace plaque in the shape of an 'oven door'. Columns with a triangle in the form of a temple. Dimensions: height 77 cm, width 79 cm, depth 4 cm, weight 68 kg; b) rectangular fireplace plaque with a "sphere and cross" and four St. Andrew's Crosses.

Dimensions: height 69 cm, width 80 cm, depth 2 cm, weight 66 kg; c) a rectangular fireplace plaque with a ball and cross made of "carved rope" and two massive columns.

Dimensions: height 53 cm, width 62 cm, depth 6 cm, weight 69 kg.

Source: Claude Augustin.

Hence, it can be concluded that the so-called blast furnace revolution was already starting in the 13th century, in the monastic and mountain forges. The main monastery of the Carthusian Order – La Grande Chartreuse – is situated in the Alps, near the town of Saint-Laurent-du-Pont. It is situated in the mountainous and wooded Chartreuse range, in the historic province of Dauphiné, now in the department of Isère (French: Isère) in the Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region, not far from Grenoble. The monastery was actively involved in ferrous metallurgy – particularly in the forges of Guiers-Mort – with the support of the Dauphin and local counts (Bouchayer, 1956, pp. 144–145). The monks of

the main monastery of Saint Bruno had a blast furnace and water hammers at the foot of the Chartreuse Mountains, at the entrance to the monastery valley in the 16th century (Boutrais, 1891, pp. 3–4). At the same time, they endured the difficult period of the religious wars, which effectively brought their iron-casting activities in the Allévar region to a halt (Bouchayer, 1956, pp. 154–155).

It is likely that it is to the Carthusians, following Auguste and Jacques Bouchayer, that the initiation of iron production should be attributed; this resulted from the use of hydraulic power and the invention of a modern method of iron smelting, namely the blast furnace process, in the Alpine mountain streams of the Allévar region (Bouchayer, 1956, p. 147; Bouchayer, 1984, pp. 198–199). However, during this period, water power was mainly used to operate water hammers (martinets), with the help of which various items for military, agricultural and domestic use were manufactured from molten iron (French: *fer fondu*) – rather than from pure cast iron, which would appear later. Bouchayer mentioned one of the charters of the rural liberties – the Bressieux Charter (French: *Bressieux*) – where as early as 1288, terms such as ‘steel ball’ (French: *balle d’acier*), iron plaque or semi-finished product (French: *carreau*), and, particularly tellingly, ‘cacabus’ – a cast-iron pot, a kind of saucepan, which was hung on a hook attached to a chain in rural fireplaces (Bouchayer, 1956, p. 148).

Fireplace plaques from the monastic religious communities and parishes in Franche-Comté in the mid-16th century (Plaques de cheminée des congrégations religieuses monastiques). People from different walks of life could afford them in the later stages of the use of cast-iron fireplace plaques in Franche-Comté. It is evidenced by the recorded instances of unauthorised use or even the appropriation of the heraldic symbols on the plaques by individuals, who did not hold the noble status. This phenomenon is evidence of the social prestige of heraldic decoration and of wealthy townspeople or the bourgeoisie’s desire to align themselves with the noble milieu visually. At the same time, in the 16th century, the commissioners and owners of cast-iron stone slabs remained predominantly wealthy noble families and the numerous abbeys of Franche-Comté, which determined the elitist nature of this type of material culture in its early period.

There were two cast-iron fireplace plaques from Franche-Comté, executed in the Gothic style in the form of a semi-circular pediment, which belonged to a type known as ‘stove doors’ (French: *les portes du fourneau*).

There was no coincidence in the term “stove doors”, which was used to describe this form of the fireplace plaque. The fireplace gradually began to “compete” with the oven, a heating system characteristic of the German tradition, from the beginning of the 16th century, in the castles and palaces of Franche-Comté. The references to the stoves appeared in the region’s written sources, particularly in the Upper Saône, as early as the reign of Emperor Charles V. By the end of the 17th century, the stove – constructed from brick, earthenware, cast-iron plaques or tin – was increasingly recorded in inventory descriptions, primarily in castles and town mansions, where it was installed in salons and dining rooms. It was only in the last third of the 18th century that the stove became more accessible to the craftsmen and the peasants; however, for the poorest sections of the population, the open hearth remained the main source of heating, despite the climatic challenges (Vernot, 2018, pp. 3–4).

Next, we should study two fireplace plaques that symbolically mark a kind of conclusion to the era of Emperor Charles V. One of them dates from 1555, the year of Emperor Charles V’s abdication in favour of Philip II (Fig. 10); the other to 1558, when Charles V died (Fig. 11).



Fig. 10. Semi-circular fireplace plaque (1555). Private collection – Claude Augustin

A semi-circular fireplace plaque featuring a 'simple' St. Andrew's Cross (Fig. 10) – a symbol of the dynastic heritage of the Dukes of Burgundy and their successors, the Habsburgs, which Charles V began to use particularly actively, as well as a measure of the national identity of the Comté (see, in particular, Vernot, 2002, pp. 13–66; Vernot, 2009, pp. 100–101). The plaque originated from an old large farm in Frasne-le-Château, in the department of Haute-Saône. It was made in 1555. The plaque was cast from a wooden mould composed of four planks, to which separate carved elements were attached: a large St. Andrew's Cross, four smaller crosses and two balusters (dimensions: height – 96 cm, width – 94 cm, thickness – 3 cm, weight – 113 kg). The tops of the columns feature slightly chiselled anthropomorphic masks resembling Native American mascarons.



Fig. 11. Part of a fireplace plaque (1558)

Source: Private collection, Charles Nijman Fireplace Antiques.

A fireplace plaque dated 1558 was discovered in a private collection in the Netherlands. Origin: blast furnaces of Upper Sona. Dimensions: height – 96 cm (?) (taking into account the

missing lower section), width – 94 cm, thickness – 2 cm. The original weight may have been around 100 kg. Its reconstruction is based on a comparison with the similar fireplace plaques from Franche-Comté of the same period, made in the form of the so-called 'stove doors', which survived to the present day in good condition. Their dimensions may have varied by a few centimetres, suggesting they originated from the same foundry or that standardised moulds typical of that era were used.

For example, there are fireplace plaques from Franche-Comté dating from the mid- to late 16th century (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12. 1) A fireplace plaque with a Latin cross and a globe in a church – a notable example of religious symbolism, combining a heraldic motif (the cross) with an architectural composition. Dimensions: 0.94×0.96 m.

2) A plaque with columns and a pediment in the form of a temple – stylistically concise, executed in the shape of a 'stove door', with balusters on the sides and a simple triangular pediment at the top, interpreted as a symbol of protection for the family hearth. Dimensions: 0.93×0.93 m; thickness: 4 cm. Photo: Claude Augustin

The 1558 fireplace plaque is of particular interest to the researcher. In its upper part, within the triangle symbolising a temple, there is a classical shield with a cross, which prevents it from being classified as a single type: it could be a 'moline cross' (French: *croix moline*). This type of cross takes its name from the French word *moulin* – "mill". It is associated with the shape of the "prongs" at the ends of the cross, which resemble mill blades or the fastenings of mill mechanisms. Another common interpretation links it to mill keys, which had a similar forked shape. This cross is also known as the anchor cross or "moored cross" (French: *croix ancrée*), which is a variant of the heraldic cross. At the same time, the "Molina Cross" frequently appears in the coats of arms of many Cistercian abbeys and is a particularly fitting emblem for the Order of Saint Bernard (de Sorval, 2003, pp. 117–118; Froger, 2012, pp. 53–58). The key figure of this order, a dominant figure in Western Christianity, was Bernard of Clairvaux (1090 – 1153), a native of the Burgundy–Franche-Comté region, who founded Clairvaux Abbey in Champagne.

The Cistercians had an extensive network of daughter monasteries in the Kingdom of France and beyond, with large landholdings; some monasteries even operated blast furnaces and forges. The fireplace plaque from 1558 was most likely used in the hall of one of the abbeys in the modern departments of Haute-Saône or Jura in Franche-Comté

(the Abbey of Bellevaux (Fr. Abbaye de Bellevaux), Cherlieu (French: Abbaye de Cherlieu) in Haute-Saône, Abbaye d'Acéy in Jura, and others); as well as the Maltese cross (Nisbet, 1816, Vol. 1, pp. 113–117).

We can spot the intertwined roots with two shoots between the two sets of five on the plaques – an image of the tree of life, which was one of the favourite motifs in Renaissance art and painting, as well as an important element of the heraldic symbolism (Froger, 2012, p. 83). There are two shoots with the leaves and roots, depicted in the centre, represent a vine – a common symbol of the nobility, fertility, fidelity and courage in the Gothic and Renaissance art. Similar motifs are frequently found on the façades of the Gothic cathedrals in Burgundy and Lorraine, and, in particular, on cast-iron fireplace plaques.

Both fireplace plaques from 1555 and 1558 (Figs. 10 and 11) depicted two fluted columns, which in Franche-Comté combined the historical, geographical and political meanings. First and foremost, this is a reference to the ancient columns: they appear on the coat of arms of Besançon, recalling the Roman structures that once stood on the site of the modern Vauban citadel, some of which survived in the old town. These columns are likely to be the remains of the Roman temples or monuments, emphasising Besançon's status as a key hub in the Roman Empire's road network. This interpretation is reinforced by the presence of the Roman road that linked Geneva and Besançon.

Cast iron fireplace plaques often conceal many mysteries that modern scholars must correctly interpret. For instance, during the initial analysis of a plaque bearing the date '1558', the year was misidentified: due to the absence of the final digit (a casting defect?), the vine branch was initially mistakenly interpreted as an intertwined '9' or '6'. It was only owing to the consultations with Professor Philip Palazi, who suggested that the fireplace plaque was indeed missing the last digit (letter from Prof. Philip Palazi to the author), and following a thorough analysis, that the barely visible outlines of the embossed number "8" were discovered.

There is a depiction of a head, which was probably intended to resemble a cherub, at the bottom, along the edge of the cut-off fragment. Imprints of a crowned cherub with outstretched wings are frequently found on Lorraine fireplace plaques from the end of the 16th to the beginning of the 17th centuries. For example (Fig. 13), a fireplace plaque bearing the coat of arms of the Duchy of Lorraine from the end of the 16th or the beginning of the 17th century.

On the other hand, this is an atypical cherub. By analogy with the German tradition of the Rhine Valley from the same period, where the cast-iron fireplace plaques depicted Emperor Charles V, noble dignitaries or townspeople in medallions, local masters of the foundries – the comtois – depicted the image of a patron saint. This is a symbol of the cultural identity of Franche-Comté, as well as Burgundy and Auvergne – the image of the local patron saint of winemaking, Saint Vernier or Saint Werner (Fig. 14) (French: Saint Vernier / Saint Werner, a localised form of veneration of Saint Werner in Franche-Comté).

The cult of Saint Vernier was brought from Trier, developed in Auvergne and flourished in the County of Burgundy after 1428. It was then, in Besançon, that the first brotherhood of Saint Vernier was established (Henri de Grèzes, 1889, XVIII, p. 121). There grew in popularity veneration of the saint in the region with each passing year. In 1548, a portion of the saint's relics was brought to Besançon, where they were solemnly displayed at Easter. From then on, these relics were kept and venerated in the collegiate church of St Mary Magdalene until the French Revolution of 1789. The second Tuesday after Easter was established in

Franche-Comté as the official feast day of Saint Vernier. In the iconography found in the churches of Franche-Comté, Burgundy and Auvergne, the saint is depicted as a young man, usually wearing a simple, flat-topped felt hat (French: *chapeau de feutre plat*) (Henri de Grèzes, 1889, XVII–XVIII, XXIII, p. 122). The outline of the figure at the bottom of the 1558 slab clearly defines a round, flat crown and moderately wide brims that slope slightly downwards – precisely the shape characteristic of flat felt hats worn by saints, pilgrims or winegrowers in Burgundy and Franche-Comté in the 15th – 16th centuries.



Fig. 13. Fireplace plaques from the end of the 16th – beginning of the 17th century. Lorraine. Dimensions: width 66 cm, height 61 cm, depth 4 cm, weight 59 kg

Source: Claude Augustin.



Fig. 14. Statue of Saint Vernier in the church of Souvigny-Sainte-Marthe (Puy-de-Dôme department, Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes region)

Source: roch-jaja.nursit.com

The image of Saint Vernier on the plaque is placed between two columns in a temple niche, symbolising his patronage over the family homestead – as a holy martyr and patron of winemaking. Several fireplace plaque depicting this saint survived to the present day, which only highlights the particularly reverent attitude towards him in a number of regions. There is depicted the head of the patron saint without any additional ornamentation on another plaque (Fig. 15), which may originate from the metallurgical valley of Ouch or the Ozerain valley (French: Ozerain).



Fig. 15. Fireplace plaque depicting a young man resembling St. Vernier. Origin – the Ouches Valley (?), Duchy of Burgundy, c. 1620 – 1630s.

Source: leboncoin.fr. Found in Vitteaux (Côte-d'Or department).

In 1595, Franche-Comté was invaded by the French troops of Henry IV, resulting in the destruction of many forges, bridges and roads. The exact number of forges and blast furnaces that were destroyed or ceased production is unknown. The following forges were destroyed during the military campaigns: Bley, Cugney, Estravaux and Echalong. The restoration of old forges and the establishment of new metallurgical production centres in Franche-Comté took place between 1598 and 1634, during the reign of Archdukes Albert and Isabelle (Delsalle, 2002, pp. 249–266).

A parish fireplace plaque dating from 1616. Another parish fireplace plaque (Fig. 16), dated 1616, was found in the municipality of Avanne (French: d'Avanne), located six kilometres from Besançon, in the Doubs department (at that time – the bailiwick of d'Amont, district of Vesoul). A preliminary analysis of the plaque suggests that it bears the coat of arms of the priest, who served as the parish priest of the village of Avanne during that period. It should be noted that the old parish church, where he served, was frequently damaged by floods and was replaced by a new one in the first third of the 19th century.

The fireplace plaque was preserved in its original fireplace in the former parish house (French: cure), having likely stood there for over four centuries.



Fig. 16. Fireplace plaque bearing the coat of arms of Jean Brury, parish priest of the village of Avann, Order of Malta. Dimensions: height 102 cm, width 91 cm, depth from 1.2 cm to 3.5 cm. Weight 137 kg. Private collection

Source: Claude Augustin.

The compositional design of this fireplace plaque is based on a simple motif of a sphere with a Jerusalem Cross. The oval coat of arms, crowned with a cross, clearly emphasised the patrons religious status. It was indicated by the characteristic details of the coat of arms: the flower on a stem in the lower left field, as a symbol of faith and protection, evoked associations with the Order of Malta as the “flower of Christianity”. According to Cesare Magalotti (It. Cesare Magalotti), the Order of St John of Jerusalem is “...a sacred and ecclesiastical Republic, composed of the flower of the most select and distinguished nobility of the entire Christian world” (c. 1635) (Buttigieg, & Caruana, 2018, p. 73). Three small rodents – rats (or mice), arranged horizontally in a row, are also a characteristic feature of the priest’s coat of arms, which we find, in particular, in d’Ozier’s armorial (Fig. 17). The surname Radiguet may have had the older form Rattiguet in the 17th century, which explains the choice of rats for the coat of arms in accordance with a play on words involving the bearer’s surname.



Fig. 17. The coat of arms of Martin Radiguet, parish priest at Courtille, Generalate of Tours, France (Martin Radiguet, prêtre curé à Courtille)

Source: Hozier Ch. BnF. Ms. 32261, Tours, II, p. 897.

In the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries, during the Spanish rule, the parish of Avann – one of the closest to Besançon – was under the patronage of the Temple/Commandery of Saint John of Jerusalem in Besançon, which belonged to the Order of Malta (Temple de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem) (Delsalle, Gauzente, p. 161). Historically, however, dating back to the period of the unified and independent Duchy of Burgundy – from the 15th century until 1723 – the seigneurie of Avann belonged to the renowned French family d’Aumont (French: d’Aumont) (BM (Besançon), MS 949, pp. 39, 79). During the French military campaign in Franche-Comté in 1636, it was the Duke d’Aumont, who acted as the patron of this village (as of 1636, this refers to Duke Antoine d’Aumont de Rochebaron, 1601 – 1669).

Hence, the church in the village of Avanne belonged to the Order of St John of Jerusalem – one of the few military-monastic orders in Europe that held sovereign status, recognised by the Pope and the Empire (ADD (Besançon). Avanne, Parish Registers. Vol. 1629 – 1697: 1; BM (Besançon), Ms 949, p. 79). The Order of Malta, as is well known, had the right to establish its own internal nobility (French: chevaliers de justice), to issue patents of ennoblement within its territory (primarily in Malta, Rhodes, Cyprus and certain provinces of the Order), and to confirm the noble status of candidates through the procedure of *preuves de noblesse* (proofs of nobility). It was precisely the Order’s system for reviewing the applications for the nobility from the potential members that may have inspired Louis XIV to issue, between 1664 and 1715, a series of decrees concerning the statutes of the nobility in France; similarly, the Bourbon governments in Spain and the Habsburg governments in Austria introduced similar procedures in the 18th century (Buttigieg, Caruana, 2018, p. 73).

In July 1615, Jean Brury (?–1629?) was appointed parish priest of the village of Avanne (ADD (Besançon). Avanne, Parish Registers. Vol. 1552 – 1632, p. 120). Louis de La Roque does not include the surname Brury in his register (armorial) of the Knights of Malta, but the author himself acknowledges that his list, containing some 15,000 surnames, is only partial. Diverse titles of the Order of Malta were burned following its dissolution in France in September 1792 (La Roque, 1891, XXIII–XXIV). This fireplace plaque was likely cast to mark the appointment of a Hospitaller priest to the parish as early as 1616, when seasonal work at the blast furnaces and foundries began.

Neither the church/commandery of St John of Jerusalem in Besançon nor the parish church in the village of Avanne, which was under the patronage of the Maltese, has survived to the present day. History has also erased much information about the coats of arms, so the reconstruction of this and similar heraldic stone slabs can contribute to the preservation and restoration of the regional history and culture. Due to the arrival in 1629 of a new priest, Antoine Girard, at the parish of Avanne, the plaque remained in the parish house and, over the years, became an integral part of the partially lost history of the village, which was part of the Besançon conurbation, for all subsequent priests.

In general, the researchers paid little attention to the stone slabs bearing the coats of arms of the parish priests, who were presumably few in number. At the same time, the role of the parish priest during times of famine, disease, epidemics and wars (particularly during the Thirty Years’ War or the Great Famine of 1693–1694) was crucial. They were the only ones, who constantly came into contact with the dying and could recognise the symptoms of disease; they also recorded deaths in parish registers, and thus became the ones who left an important part of statistical and demographic information for future generations (Lachiver, 1991, p. 169).

The hearth slabs of Franche-Comté, which resembled “stove doors” in shape and, in their proportions and outlines, drew on the Gothic tradition, remained a sought-after product

of local foundries virtually until the active phase of the Thirty Years' War in the region (until 1636). In 1636, the authorities of Franche-Comté likely did not manage, at the outset of hostilities with France, to destroy all the smithies and foundries to prevent them from falling into the hands of Richelieu's and Prince Condé's troops and being used during the siege of the county's fortified towns. The last "peacetime" fireplace plaque, cast shortly before the outbreak of hostilities in 1636, was discovered in a farm building in the village of Rainans, situated near Besançon, then the capital of Franche-Comté, and close to the border with France (AMC (Besançon). Rainans (Jura)).

Following the devastation of the Thirty Years' War, which caused significant human and economic losses in Franche-Comté, craftsmen generally abandoned rounded forms, gradually shifting to rectangular designs that conquered local and almost all regional markets in France with confidence. At the same time, Besançon columns or balusters almost always remained their constant feature. In the 1670s – 1680s, Comtois fireplace plaques of a Gothic, rounded shape were still being produced in individual foundries (Fig. 18); the latest known stone slabs of this type dated from 1738 (AMC (Besançon): Andelot-en-Montagne (Jura)). Thus, with the disappearance of these types of fireplace plaques from production, a part of the region's iron-casting tradition, which had originated as early as the beginning of Habsburg rule, faded into oblivion.



Fig. 18. Fireplace plaque, 1680. Found in Lavernay (R. Lavernay, Doubs). Besançon Citadel (Coll. Musée Comtois). Dimensions: height 80 cm, width 79 cm, depth 1.7 cm. Photo by the author

Conclusions. The fireplace plaques of Franche-Comté constitute a unique material source that combines religious (apotropaic), political, and domestic symbolism. The Cross of St. Andrew served a protective function whilst also emphasising the national identity of the Comtois; the globus cruciger was primarily interpreted as a symbol of Christ's dominion over the world rather than exclusively as a Carthusian symbol. The monasteries (the Cistercians and, to some extent, the Carthusians) were the pioneers of mass production, but direct attribution of the plaques is possible only where a complete heraldic ensemble is present. The production of the fireplace plaques correlates clearly with periods of peace

and economic prosperity and ceased entirely during wars (for example: 1595, 1636 – 1650). There was presented the elite nature of early fireplace plaques (commissioned by the nobility, abbey and parish priests) and highlighted their value for the preservation of the cultural heritage of Franche-Comté and for a broader study of European material culture of the 16th – 17th centuries in the study.

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